

The Builder.

No. CCXCV.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 1848.



ON Monday morning, in last week, we left England to visit the stone quarries of Caen, determined to see and judge of them for ourselves, and to spare no pains in obtaining ample and correct information on a subject which is of considerable consequence to the English public, and is felt to be so by a large number of persons. We were accompanied by Mr. Charles H. Smith, one of the commissioners appointed to decide on the stone to be used for the outside of the New Houses of Parliament, whose knowledge of the subject is well known, and who has entered warmly into the inquiry with us.

Circumstances led us to enter France by crossing from Folkestone to Boulogne, although, as our readers are aware, this is by no means so near a road to the object of our inquiry as by passing from Southampton to Havre, whence a steam-boat once every day takes merchandise and passengers to Caen in about four hours, crossing the *embouchure* of the Seine, and traversing the river Orne, on which this ancient and interesting town is situated. As it happened, we were thrown into the midst of the late fraternising *fête* at Boulogne, where trumpets, tricolors, and triumphal arches superabounded. We might add another word, beginning with *t* (and that not *taste*); but the intention seemed good, and all the feeling exhibited was kindly, and we therefore avoid comment on the execution. The amazing extent of the decorations (such as they were), shewed the earnestness with which the people had entered into the demonstration, and invested it with something like dignity.

The new church of *Notre Dame de Boulogne*, now building, forms a very prominent feature, rising high above the town, and will surprise, when approached, by its great height and extent, if it should not charm by its beauty or good taste. The plan is a Latin cross, the style Italian, and at the junction of the nave and transept rises a circular structure of great height and size, to be surmounted by a dome. The upper part of this tower, forming the tambour of the dome, is in three stories. The middle story has a continued series of columns around it supporting an entablature, the frieze of which is formed into flat segmental arches springing from column to column! The top story has a range of coupled columns of smaller size. The soffit of the segmental arches, the upper entablature, and other parts, present Latin inscriptions. The nave and transepts are not roofed in, and have been standing so for some time; the lady chapel is completed, and used for service. This building has a priest-architect, if we were rightly informed, namely, the director of the college, and is proceeded with gradually as funds are obtained, thus resembling in two respects the churches of the middle ages. We must not carry the comparison further, however, for beyond the strong faith and expansive views which could prompt the commencement of such an enormous and costly pile, with small immediate resources, there is little to praise; and we are forced to regret the evident want of

artistic direction. It is a grand intention miserably marred.

On the site of the church there is an ancient crypt of extraordinary extent and complexity, for which a very early date is claimed, and probably with justice. It has been so shamefully disfigured, however, by its present conservators, by modern colourings, "decorations," transparencies, &c., apparently for the purpose of making it better worth to the vulgar the *franc* which is charged for viewing it, that much of its interest is lost, and the walk through it filled us with indignation instead of pleasure.

At Abbeville we were glad to find the masons at work, although only to a small extent, on the cathedral. It is almost too late in the day to tell our readers of the great beauty of the west front of this building. It is perfectly marvellous, and should not be passed by any who have not seen it, and are journeying on the rail to Paris. The station is at some little distance from Abbeville, and leaves the moats and drawbridges of the town inviolate; but a diligence meets the train to take passengers on. A building such as this cathedral is a sheet anchor, the preservation of which should be regarded as of the utmost importance by the town. "While the Coliseum stands Rome shall stand;" and the same may be said of some other buildings and some other places.

The comforts which attend the "iron horse," rapidly and ample space, increase the impatience and fastidiousness of travellers under other circumstances. Nine hours spent in a small diligence between Abbeville and Rouen were hard to endure, but ultimately, like all sublunary things, including up to this time "perpetual motions" of every description, did come to an end, and were almost paid for by the magnificent view which is presented by Rouen, the most picturesque of French towns, when it first opens on the traveller. The iron spire placed on the tower of the cathedral (wanting but the apex), is a black spot in the prospect, and greatly disfigures the edifice. It is, nevertheless, a very extraordinary work, and this is made strikingly obvious by visiting a yard attached to the cathedral, and learning that an enormous mass of ironwork there built up, bolted, and braced, and rivetted together, is to be raised and form what you considered was a mere finial wanting to complete the spire. When finished, the top of it will be about 490 ft. from the ground.

The process of restoration is going on to a great extent in Rouen, though checked by the late disastrous political convulsions. At the west front of the cathedral two enriched buttresses of large size have been put up "in block," as is the practice in France, and are ready for the sculptors. At St. Ouen, the neighbouring and rival church, the whole west front is being restored and two new towers added, under the direction of M. Gregoire, the town architect. It is all up in block, and the two spires have been sculptured and made perfect down to the top of the towers.* There are advantages about this mode of proceeding, but the extra cost (amongst other things), which attends working stone in its place rather than in the shed, has prevented the adoption of it in England.

The interior of St. Ouen is full of beauties, and would afford us the easy enjoyment of a long description, if such were our present

purpose.* The stone used appears to be the oolite from *Caumont, Seine Inférieure*, which contains flints in great abundance, and these in many cases are left in unworked, and project across mouldings very singularly, inducing a feeling of astonishment, that amidst so much that is beautiful, such eyesores should have been permitted to remain. The joints of the stone work are large.

The south porch, seldom seen by visitors, displays pendent arches springing from carved bosses, and is as remarkable for skilful construction as for beauty in design. The rose windows in this church are very fine: that in the north transept is said to have been executed by the apprentice of the master mason employed (who had himself worked the window in the opposite transept), and to have led to his murder by his master through envy. A similar unlikely story is told, as our readers will probably remember, of the "apprentice pillar," in Roslin Chapel, near Edinburgh. The centre of this northern window at St. Ouen is almost wholly occupied by the mystic combination of triangles (in continuous line), known as the *pentapla*, of very large size, which was so favourite a symbol with the mediæval architects, and is to be found all over Europe.

At the church of St. Maclou, masons are at work on the entrance front: some of the flying buttresses and pinnacles have been restored. The lower part of this front is an elaborate mass of sculpture, and is in a fair condition. The stone appears to be the oolite last mentioned, and contains flints in great abundance. The curiously sculptured stone staircase in this church which leads to the organ gallery is of the same stone, and is similarly spotted and disfigured by flints.

This staircase (dating from the end of the 15th or beginning of 16th century), together with a staircase in the cathedral of the same city (ascribed to the year 1460), is well deserving study. The license which the gothic architects allowed themselves, with the right of adaptation to wants and circumstances, were much greater than is permitted to modern architects, in any case where they cannot shew that the one particular license in question was taken by some ancient predecessor.

What we have said already will shew that the restorers have been busy in Rouen, but one of the largest works in progress yet remains to be mentioned, and that is the very interesting *Palais de Justice*, where a very considerable sum of money has been expended. This edifice is a very elaborate specimen of the last period of pointed architecture, with lofty roofs, buttresses, and pinnacles, highly enriched gables, and projecting turrets. It forms three sides of a courtyard, and not only has the whole of the old work been restored (and for the most part fairly done), but one of the three sides, consisting of modern discordant buildings, has been taken down and rebuilt in accordance with the original structure. The opposite side contains the *Salle des Procureurs*, a hall 135 feet long and 57 feet broad. The very extraordinary panelled wood ceiling of the *Cour d'Assises* in the central portion of the palace, was illustrated in THE BUILDER some time since.† Since the establishment of the republic, the works have been stopped for want of money.

* This church, with the majority of the other buildings to which we shall have occasion to allude, are illustrated in Pugin and Britton's "Specimens of the Architectural Antiquities of Normandy."

† Vol. IV. p. 471.

* The towers do not appear to be in accordance with the original intention.